

Speak-O-Mind: Expanding Your Thoughts through Guided Writing

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Abstract

In an English as a second or foreign language classroom, speaking is usually reproduction and imitation of what the teachers do. However, to develop a fluency and basic speaking competency, it will require more than just memorising chunks of words and phrases. Students need to be able to use English language spontaneously and creatively in order to become communicatively competent. To accomplish this, we propose incorporating writing skills into the process of assisting students in expanding their thoughts and creativity when speaking in English. This project called 'Speak-O-Mind' proposes a framework in expanding students' creativity and speaking abilities through a guided writing. Students will be able to explore and expand their creativity in producing a good command of spoken English at the end of the session after going through the writing process. We will also look at how the framework will support the students in gradually developing their creativity as well as their thoughts by utilising both speaking and writing skills.

Keywords: Online Learning, English Language, Language Learning, Second Language, Speaking Skills, Guided Writing.

Background of the Innovation

English has been taught as a compulsory subject in Malaysian schools (primary and secondary) since the country's independence in 1957. It is also used as the medium of instruction for most tertiary institutions including University Malaysia Kelantan (UMK). Malaysians are encouraged to study English because it is used so regularly in a variety of daily activities like business, education, and administration. Malaysia is one of the very few nations in the world where English is officially used as a second language, therefore the language is viewed as being a crucial component of the educational system there (Thirusanku and Yunus, 2012). The value of the English language, which has been dubbed the "global trade language," has become clearly obvious as a result of globalisation. In the internet and information age, where English is the dominant language, knowing and practising the language is essential for achieving worldwide stature. Today, English is acknowledged as the world's most widespread language and as the lingua franca. Despite the fact that English Second Language (ESL) learners in Malaysia would technically be learning English for at least 11 years of their lives, many of them are still having a low proficiency level in the language, with limited range of vocabulary and lexical items, and not to miss out, their inadequate speaking skills including poor pronunciation.

English language instruction has historically relied heavily on memorization techniques, such as

drilling, repetition, and copying teachers' actions. The training and learning of speaking become routine and dull for the learners as a result of the memorization technique. In a study by Yahaya et al. (2011), several Malaysian employers claimed that our graduates are unemployed as a result of their inability to communicate in English. Many students who have studied English as a second language for 11 years perform poorly when they graduate from secondary school. It is compulsory that Malaysian students must raise their level of English proficiency, so that they can secure a job in future. Low-level English speakers will undoubtedly lack the soft skills required for effective communication in a global context. One of the language abilities that has generated a lot of debate and is frequently discussed by educators and politicians is speaking ability. Despite the fact that the majority of pupils passed the English proficiency test, not all of them can speak the language fluently. Moreover, fluency should be valued more highly than accuracy in the educational system, and students should have more opportunities to present and role-play. These kinds of activities would assist students in overcoming their public speaking anxiety and enhancing their fluency. More than that, the development of fluency and basic speaking competencies requires more than just producing memorised chunks of language, as the learners need opportunities to use language spontaneously. They need to have a set of creativity in order to create a new dimension of language learning.

As stated by Richards (2013), creativity is usually described as “having a number of different dimensions: the ability to solve problems in original and valuable ways that are relevant to goals; seeing new meanings and relationships in things and making connections; having original and imaginative thoughts and ideas about something; using the imagination and past experience to create new learning possibilities.” Thornbury (2005) added that the learners should be provided with opportunities like ‘real operating conditions’ in order to progress with their acquisition of the target language in becoming communicatively competent. Engel and Groot-Wilken (2007) also pointed out that using the target language creatively may be an important motivational factor for the learners: “In order to keep the joy, enthusiasm and ambition of young learners alive, it is important to provide them with more opportunities to discover and experiment with the language (...) (and) to give more attention to the creative and productive learning processes”. Due to this, English is perceived as a subject that places more of an emphasis on the language's mechanics than on making links with how it is used in real-world contexts. This is strongly supported by Che Musa et al., (2012) as they said, learning English is a process that is separated from conversation and involves "set" ways to use the language.

In light of the concerns raised above, we are trying to come out in a different approach in teaching for imparting speaking skills to the students. Since they are the ones who must utilise the language, particularly after graduating and entering the working world, we are concentrating on the tertiary level. Apart from using the traditional way of interpreting the speaking skills to the learners, we are aiming to expand their creativity by proposing a framework using guided writing. In this framework, we are integrating the approach with the use of the technology as we move towards IR 4.0. Technologies that are still relatively new, like the Internet and other education-related software, present opportunities for teaching and learning that have the potential to be transformative. This is linked to the acquisition of new skills that are pertinent to the 21st century's emerging technological needs (Mishra & Mehta, 2017). There has also been a change from a knowledge-based approach where students were expected to memorise prescribed content to one that encourages self-access and independent study with long-term learning outcomes. With the aid of this system, students are to be prepared for the 21st century by developing their soft skills and their ability to think critically and creatively, along with the ability to work cooperatively, exhibit leadership qualities, and take personal responsibility. We can see that this is an added value for them since they would be more equipped to compete in the domestic and worldwide job markets, plus it would help the students to achieve beyond the classroom sphere.

Description of the Innovation

Speak-O-mind is a framework that integrates speaking skills through guided writing. In this framework, the authors listed down sequence guidance on how to write a product review. The learners will use the framework to write their review, where afterwards they will transfer the skills from writing to speaking presentation. In their presentation, they will for instance, express their ideas and thoughts through speaking output (presentation) by applying the language skills that they acquired during the guided writing session from the instructors. It can be seen that the students applied the useful vocabulary and lexical items in the subject matter that they have chosen. Moreover, they can mix and match the vocabulary and the lexical items with their own words using their creativity that leads to more creative output at the end (presentation). To explain in details, the instructor will provide a template for the students in the e-learning platform. There are a few categories or sections in the template to be completed by the students. The first one is descriptions and specifications of the product. The students need to describe the specific details of their chosen product in this section. Then, they will move to the next section which is self-experience. In this section, they will write their own experience in using the product they chose. Then, they will write about the strengths or pros of the product. Next is their recommendation in using the product. Lastly, they will conclude their template with their own ideas and creativity in promoting the product. After finishing the template, they will submit it and get the immediate feedback from the instructor. The instructor will provide the feedbacks along with the suggestion and comments for the students. For example, the instructors will comment on the ideas and what can be improved to enhance the creativity from the students. After they have gotten the feedback from the instructor, they will work on the speaking task and perform it through the video presentation to be evaluated by the instructor. All of these are being integrated while making full advantage of our available e-learning platform. For more details, it is illustrated in the model in Figure 1 and is described in the following sections.

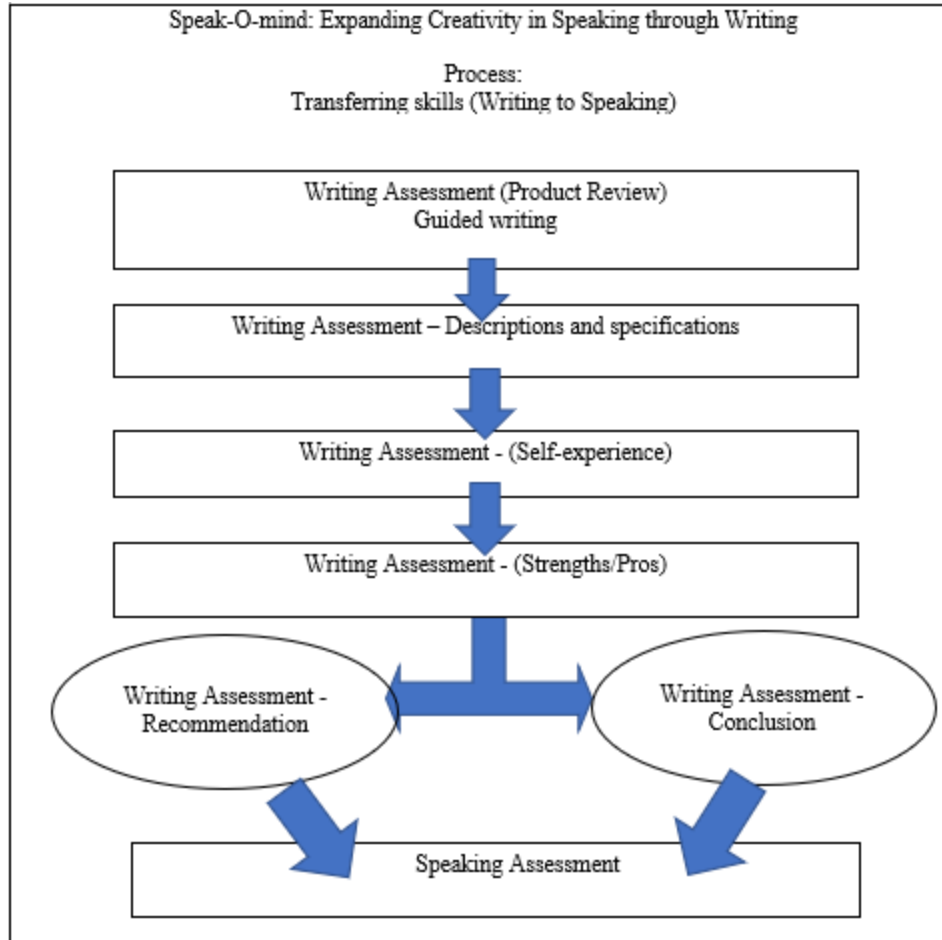


Figure 1: The Framework

Significance of the Innovation

For students: Using the framework, students can optimize their speaking skills through a guided writing. The students can boost their language speaking skills when they boost their writing. According to a study by Tom et al. (2013), students should acquire the basics of presentation skills, such as how to arrange a single presentation, how to begin and end a presentation, and how to communicate both orally and nonverbally. With the template of the framework, students can utilise it for their speaking presentation's arrangement. They may write their ideas in the template and get immediate feedback from the instructor. In addition to using a number of exercises to help students overcome their fear of speaking English, teachers can aid students by being friendly, encouraging, and optimistic in the classroom (Severinus Tati et al., 2016). Plus, the connection works the other way around, too. With the integration of the e-tools, students will be able to learn in a more refined e-learning environment. Utilizing technology in the classroom may improve students' comprehension and linguistic performance in their target language. This is due to the fact that using technology in the classroom tends to be more interesting for the students, boosting their capacity to understand what is being taught.

For instructors: Instructors will be able to assess students' understanding in their learning and provide effective feedback to the students. Instructors play an active role as facilitators to facilitate students' learning as well as incorporating technology into their lessons. When the students submitted the full template to the instructor, they will assess and comment on what have been written then provide suggestions and feedback in what students need to change or improve. The instructor will also be able to have a two-way communication with the students when they are commenting as a means to get through the students' psychological obstacles like fear and anxiety. This will instil the emotional connection between instructors and students in teaching and learning environment so it will be more pleasant and stress-free. This is because, for students to be motivated to speak the intended language, instructors must foster a welcoming and cooperative environment while they are in the process. Hence the design of the framework can improve students' ability to promote oral fluency as well as the written skills.

Impact of the Innovation Towards Education or Community

From this framework, we hope to help the students to develop their creativity in speaking and expand them for their future use. Griffith (2014) suggested that the educators should encourage the learners to enhance their creativity and imagination in themselves, who may then contribute to the economies of their countries. Furthermore, according to Burnard (2006), said that the role of creativity in the economy is being seen as crucial (to assist nations for attaining higher employment, economic achievement (Davies, 2002) and to cope with increased competition.

It is for this reason that creativity cannot be "ignored or suppressed through schooling" (Poole, 1980). Creativity needs to be developed to prepare future generations (Parkhurst, 1999) so that they can "survive as well as thrive in the twenty-first century" (Craft, 2006). More than that, we also want to boost their self-confidence in expressing their thoughts and ideas in both writing and speaking. The emotional connection between students and educators in the classroom must be pleasant. To encourage students to speak the intended language, instructors must foster a welcoming and cooperative environment in the classroom. Authentic activities and resources will also help learners build their drive and sense of self-worth so they can speak the language with confidence. Goel and Aggarwal (2012) mentions that confident people feel socially competent, mature emotionally, sufficient in intelligence, success, satisfaction, firm, optimistic, independent, confident, constantly moving, and having outstanding leadership qualities. It can be said that the presences of self-confidence in students is very crucial because it will enable them to believe in their abilities, not easily give up in the face of every problem so that students are able to perform all asks provided independently and with maximum results. So, it is very important to instill self-confidence in students for the sake of their future when they serve the community later. Online discussion forums, for example, might give low-skill students a place and a platform to practice their language skills in the second language (Abu Bakar et al., 2017). This is so because the students are actively involved in and manage the learning environment. This can also be adapted using our approach as the student will be able to manage the learning themselves with the instructor as the facilitator to help them when needed. ESL students eventually overcome their hesitancy and uncertainty and gain confidence in speaking English when given the opportunity to utilize the language in a safe learning environment. As our framework is integrating the use of online platform with the template provided, we hope that this can help the students in instilling their self-confidence.

Eventually, this innovation was developed with not just the aim to promote and expand the creativity in ESL teaching and learning process but also to optimize the use of technology in ESL teaching and learning for future sustainability. This innovation is hoped to stimulate the education revolution from conventional teaching and learning towards the digital technology engagement.

Commercialization Potential

Since it is an educational learning innovation, it can be commercialized to all educational institutions locally and internationally. It can be replicated into other subjects, not limited to language courses only. Moreover, it can also be included as a level-appropriate session in a professional development programme focusing on language skill improvement. Other than that, it will be included as one of the modules for the UMK Micro-Credentials programme, as well.

Conclusion

It is hoped that this innovation will overcome the difficulties and challenges in developing oracy and literacy skills in an integrated manner and be beneficial for performance management and fostering an excellent-oriented culture in English language learning.

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